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The status of women police officers: An international review

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Abstract

This paper reports on a survey of English-language police department websites, annual reports and other reports in order to identify key aspects of the status of women police internationally. Findings are reported for England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, the United States, Canada, Australia (eight departments), New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji. Data on the proportion of female officers were available from 18 of 23 locations, with a range between 5.1% and 28.8%. Recruit numbers were available for six locations, and ranged between 26.6% and 37.0%. Limited data on rank and deployment indicated overall improvements. Available longer-term trend data suggested that growth in female officers was slowing or levelling out. Overall, the study showed an urgent need to improve gender-based statistics in order to better inform strategies aimed at maximising the participation of women in policing.

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Keywords: Women police; Female police; Gender equity; Equal employment opportunity; Affirmative action

1. Background

The development of modern ‘professional’ policing in the nineteenth century was an extremely important social innovation, but one that failed to include women. Female police

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were first appointed in a sprinkling of locations in the early decades of the twentieth century, including Portland Oregon in 1908, Los Angeles in 1910 and Toronto in 1913. Further expansion occurred during the First World War, largely due to labour shortages (Brown and Heidensohn, 2000; Jackson, 2006). Appointments continued on a piecemeal basis as the century progressed, and often comparatively late. In Eire, for example, the first women police were appointed in 1959, four decades later than the United Kingdom (Clancy, 2009). Pioneer female officers were usually limited to very small numbers within women police units, working predominantly as assistants to male detectives. The 1950s and '60s saw the beginnings of a gradual break out from this cloistered environment as women entered juvenile aid units and school traffic squads, eventually joining mixed patrol teams in the 1970s (Heidensohn, 1992).

By the 1990s, the numbers of female officers in the more progressive democracies reached the 10+% mark, but with women often absent from smaller units such as water police or dog squads. Recent research indicates that in most developed democracies the percentage of sworn women police remains at or below one quarter, with much lower numbers in management ranks, and with women from racial or ethnic minorities suffering greater marginalisation (Cordner and Cordner, 2011; Moses, 2010; Stroshine and Brandl, 2011). Women also remain grossly under-represented in most non-democratic nations or emerging democracies; (Gultekin et al., 2010; Natarajan, 2008). Recent research also points to a levelling out in female recruit numbers in the advanced jurisdictions – around one third in the more optimistic scenarios – and a possible problem with female attrition (Cordner and Cordner, 2011; Prenzler et al., 2010; Ulicki, 2011; Van Ewijk, 2012). On current projections, any prospect of numerical gender equity appears to have been lost, with the overall proportion of sworn female officers likely to plateau around 30%, at best, in many departments over the next decade. This is particularly concerning given that research commissioned by the British Association of Women Police in 2006 suggested that a 35% representation of female officers was necessary for adequate progression and cultural integration (Brown et al., 2006).

The present situation is very much the legacy of powerful forces of opposition. In her 1980 paper on the status of women police in the United States, Susan Martin alleged that:

The incursion of women into traditionally 'male' occupations has been opposed, resisted, and undermined wherever it has occurred. In few other occupations, however, has their entry been more vigorously fought – on legal, organisational, informal, and interpersonal levels – than in policing (Martin, 1980: 79).

The 'women police movement' of the early-twentieth century was only successful in creating a very small space for female officers by making their role an extension of social welfare work. Women police were often unsworn, appointed on lower pay rates, without any rank structure and without a pension scheme, and they were subject to dismissal if they married (Prenzler, 2002). The entry and expansion of women police was, in general, fiercely opposed by police managers and police union leaders. On the job, women were often undermined by colleagues' lack of support, by sexual harassment, and by discrimination in deployment and promotion (Hunt, 1990; Brown and Heidensohn, 2000). The male monopoly on police work was supported by powerful stereotypes about the nature of police work and intrinsic gendered traits. Policing was seen as requiring symbolic authority and physical force that only males could exercise. These myths were perpetrated despite research in the 1970s and '80s indicating that women police were as effective as men on most performance measures, and generally better at diffusing conflict, and that there was strong public support for women police (Lunneborg, 1989). From the 1970s, integration was imposed on police by equal opportunity

legislation, but female quotas were frequently retained until police managers were forced to abandon them by litigation (Martin and Jurik, 2007). Legislation was then often subverted through the application of military-style obstacle course tests in recruitment and more subtle forms of discrimination on the job (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Dick and Hyde, 2006; Lonsway et al., 2002; Silvestri, 2003).

The employment of women police involves a variety of benefits, which have frequently been denied or underestimated. Equity in policing supports the global mission to create genuine equality and independence for women, including through employment and better delivery of social services (United Nations, 2009). Policing can offer secure and stimulating work for women, with diverse career opportunities, and with increasing opportunities for flexible employment. The presence of women police also provides an alternative contact point for victims of crime confronted by the well-documented insensitivity of many male police (National Center for Women and Policing, 2002). Policy makers need to guard against ‘gender essentialism’ in promoting feminised policing (Valenius, 2007), and equal opportunity should remain the primary rationale for promoting police careers to women. At the same time, there is a strong argument that female victims of crime, in particular, should have access to female officers (Natarajan, 2008). The research evidence is also fairly strong in showing that increased female participation in policing will lead to reduced complaints and reduced misconduct – including less reliance on the use of force (Corsianos, 2011; National Center for Women and Policing, 2002). There is also potential for women police to make a major contribution to improving security and prosperity in developing nations through participation in peacekeeping missions and as part of the professionalization of Indigenous policing (UN-INSTRAW, 2007; UNDP, 2007).

The depth of police resistance to gender equity demonstrated the need for strong equal employment opportunity legislation to overcome discrimination, and for affirmative action in some cases. In the United States, the imposition of recruitment quotas through litigation and consent decrees was crucial to advancing the status of women police (Martin and Jurik, 2007). In other locations, improved numerical representation was achieved through a range of supportive measures, including targeted recruitment campaigns, pre-application classes, career development courses and mentoring programs (Prenzler, 2002). The inclusion of women on all selection and promotion panels is one equal opportunity measure, along with the establishment of equity units and sexual harassment officers, and the inclusion of equity content and anti-harassment information in training. Paid parental leave was a major innovation, introduced into public sectors, that has been extended to fathers as well as mothers. This has allowed women police to retain employment and return to work to continue their career while juggling childcare responsibilities. Part-time or ‘flexible’ employment has been a further innovation, generally aimed at mothers but accessible to all police employees, along with childcare advisory or support services. Research shows that police supervisors have a key discretionary role in supporting or undermining flexible employment options (Charlesworth et al., 2009). However, there are also indications that many women police who take up the option of maternity leave often elect not to return to work (Prenzler et al., 2010). The gender equity agenda in policing has also been challenged to some extent by research indicating that a staged approach may be more successful in strongly patriarchal societies (Macdowell Santos, 2005; Natarajan, 2008). This involves the establishment of women police units that work largely with women and children. Cultural acceptance of women police through this work can open the doors to gradual integration into mainstream policing.

2. Method

Lack of data presents as a major hurdle to any international comparative assessment of the status of women police. There is no single repository, such as the United Nations website, where interested parties can access contemporary and historical data on key dimensions of gender in policing. Even at the national level, and within jurisdictions, data are generally inadequate. It is often difficult to access basic male/female numbers for all sworn officers, let alone data across key organisational dimensions – including training, ranks, specialist units, separations, and sex discrimination and harassment complaints. The absence of these data is particularly concerning because management of equity programs requires detailed statistics to ensure effective monitoring of women's progress – or regress – across all dimensions of a police organisation and to evaluate the impact of specific equity strategies (Martin, 1980).

The availability of official public source material on gender in policing, including government and police reports, is patchy at best, with statistical data quickly out of date. Some jurisdictions have become more proactive in commissioning reports specifically relating to gender issues and women police. For example, the UK government made gender equality a key issue within inspection programs since the [Women and Work Commission \(2006\)](#) and the [Equal Opportunities Commission \(2006\)](#) identified ongoing gender discrimination and pay inequality. The Gender Equality Duty (GED), put forward in the *Equality Act 2006*, has been behind detailed reports and plans, such as the [Home Office \(2010\)](#) report *Assessment of Women in the Police Service*.

With these issues in mind, the authors sought to identify current sources on gender in policing internationally, with a view to making comparative assessments about the status of women police. Inter-jurisdictional comparisons are useful for benchmarking, in demonstrating achievements, and identifying areas where improvements are desirable. The researchers conducted internet searches on police departments with English language websites, as well as searching government sites related to equity and public service management, up to July 2012. The findings cover England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In each case, the most recently available data on women police were included, either from annual collections or special reports. Wherever possible, data were sought beyond male/female sworn officer figures to include ranks and other key organisational dimensions. Historical data were also included wherever possible to identify long-term trends. Attention was also paid to policy statements and documents. The findings section of the paper reports on these sources and data, while the discussion section highlights areas where improvements need to be made in data collection and reportage.

3. Findings

3.1. England and Wales

Annual statistics on *Police Service Strength, England and Wales* by the Home Office, covering the 43 constabularies, do not include a gender breakdown (e.g., [Home Office, 2012](#)). The most recent and most comprehensive source at the national level is the 2010 report *Assessment of Women in the Police Service*. The [Home Office \(2010\)](#) study concluded that:

The police service has made substantial progress in the recruitment, representation and progression of female officers over the last 10 years.

There are more female officers and staff than ever before, female recruitment is strong, and women officers' chances of promotion are generally on a par with their male counterparts (p. 3).

It was estimated that in 2009 there were more than 36,000 women police, constituting 25% of police strength (Home Office, 2010, p. 6). This represented a steady progression of approximately 1% per annum over ten years from 17% in 2000 and 2001, as shown in Fig. 1. For 2009, there was some variation in female representation between the 43 forces. Cumbria had 32% women, while Hertfordshire and Surrey had 30% (pp. 24–25). The City of London Police had the lowest figure at 21%, and there were three other forces at 23%.

The recruitment of women fluctuated over time, with a large increase from approximately 26% in 2003 to a peak of 41% in 2007, down to 37% in 2009, as shown in Fig. 2. In 2009, 17 forces had 40% or more female recruits (Home Office, 2010, pp. 24–25). North Wales had 58%, Humberside 54% and Warwickshire 53%.

The Home Office report also compared women's representation in the police hierarchy, at the national level, for 1999 and 2009. Precise figures were not provided, but the proportions at all ranks had more than doubled on the whole (2010, p. 9). In 2009, women were approximately 8% of Sergeants, 14% of Inspectors, 15% of Chief Inspectors, 11% of Superintendents, and 12% of Chief Superintendents and ACPOs (Assistant Chief Constable and above). An examination of length of time to promotion found that women were generally being promoted at a faster rate than men (pp. 10–11).

A study was also made of gender and specialist policing positions, limited to 2009. In comparison to the overall average of 25% female representation, women were under-represented in a number of areas, including 'Firearms/Tactical' (5%), 'Traffic' (9%), 'Underwater' (9%), 'Air' (10%), 'Vice' (12%), 'Dogs' (13%), 'Surveillance' (17%), 'Fraud' (17%) and 'Drugs' (18%) (2010, p. 23). There was over-representation in the traditional area of 'Child/Sex/Domestic/Missing persons' at 54%, but there had been a large increase in women working in CID, from 8% in 1998 to 26% (p. 12). Women were also comparatively well represented in 'Asset Confiscation' (29%), 'Marine' (36%) and 'Mounted' (48%) (p. 23).

Finally, retention was also examined. Predictably, males were much more likely to retire, due to length of service. Otherwise, rates for voluntary separations or dismissals were only fractionally different, at 1.5% for females and 1.4% for males (2010, p. 13). Exit interviews indicated 60% of resignations by females were for 'domestic reasons' and 21% for 'another job' (p. 15). For males, the results were 46% for domestic reasons and 25% for another job.

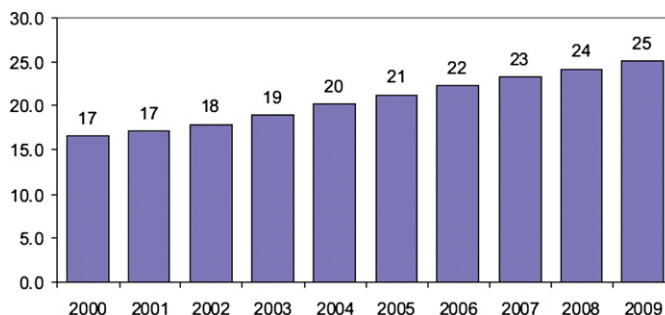


Fig. 1. England and Wales: Females as a Proportion of all Officers, 2000–2009. Source: Home Office, 2010, p. 6. Note: 2000 and 2002 figures do not include officers on 'career breaks or maternity/paternity leave'. Figures are based on full-time equivalence.

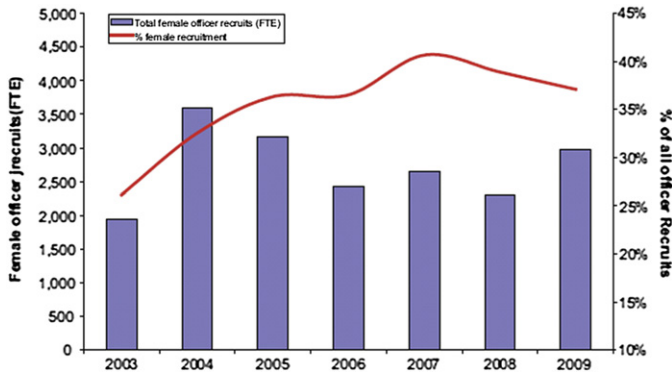


Fig. 2. England and Wales, Female Recruits, 2003–2009. Source: [Home Office, 2010](#), p. 4. Note: Transfers and rejoinders not included.

The *Assessment of Women in the Police Service* was made possible by the requirement, under the Gender Equality Duty (GED) (above), for police authorities to publish data on equity. Forces are also required to set their own targets and strategies – ‘Gender Equality Schemes’ – based on local conditions ([Home Office, 2010](#), p. 17). Assistance was provided by the British Association of Women Police (BAWP), which published a *Gender Agenda* statement in the mid-2000s ([Home Office, 2010](#), p. 16). The agenda led to the establishment of female police support networks, including a ‘Specialist network’ that encouraged women to apply to specialist positions. The Association also had a media strategy to encourage public support for women in policing. In addition, a Women in Policing Steering Group was established in 2007 to assist police authorities to write the ‘Equality Schemes’. The National Policing Improvement Agency also worked with the BAWP to create a ‘good practice’ database in 2009.

3.2. Scotland

The Scottish Police Service Authority consisted of eight forces, which merged into one in 2012. The Authority does not publish annual personnel statistics with a male/female breakdown. The *Gender Agenda Scotland, Action Plan 2008–2011*, by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS, 2008), included male/female numbers from 2000 to 2008, showing an increase from 16.4% in 2000 to 23.1% in 2008 (3895 of 16,838) (p. 6). Growth was fairly steady at approximately 1% per annum, with a slight reduction in increases in the last two years of data. The ACPOS report noted a number of success stories, including women making up 50% of probationary officers in the Central Scotland Police, and an increase in female officers in the Northern Constabulary from 14% in 2000 to 28% in 2008 (p. 8). Progress in Scotland has been influenced by a very similar set of strategies to those adopted in England and Wales. The first *Gender Agenda Scotland Action Plan* was launched by ACPOS in 2004, with a focus on localised police diversity plans, including assistance from the BAWP and Scottish Women’s Development Forums (ACPOS, 2008).

3.3. Northern Ireland

The Police Service of Northern Ireland annual reports do not include data on police strength. The Service’s website reports ‘Workforce Composition Figures’, showing there were

26.7% female officers in 2012 (PSNI, 2012). A 2008 *Equality Impact Assessment* found that the percentage of women had increased from approximately 12% in 2001 to approximately 22% in 2008, with a slowing of growth in the last few years (PSNI., 2008, p. 69). Growth in women police was part of ‘unprecedented organisational change’ in the Service following the 1999 report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland, which recommended major reforms including a staff profile more reflective of the community (2008, p. 69).

The *Northern Ireland Act (1998)* includes a requirement for proactive measures to promote equality. Under the Act, the PSNI was required to develop an ‘Equality Scheme’, to be approved by an Equality Commission (PSNI., 2008, p. 2). Equity innovations in the PSNI have included outsourcing of recruitment, targeting of women in recruitment, flexible work options, and a ‘Child Care Voucher Scheme’ (pp. 55 & 64). Unusually, the *Equality Impact Assessment* includes an analysis of the progression of female applicants through the recruitment process. As far as can be ascertained from the data, across 15 recruitment rounds, from 2001 to 2008, women made up 37.0% of applicants and passed through all stages close to that rate. However, a higher rate of withdrawal (45.4%) resulted in a recruitment rate of 35.8% (PSNI., 2008, Appendix II, p. 6).

3.4. *Eire*

The annual reports of An Garda Síochána contain no information on female officers. An official 50th anniversary history of women police in 2009 reported there was a total of 3375 female officers, or 23.1% of the 14,603 total sworn strength (Clancy, 2009, p. 28; also An Garda Síochána, 2010, p. 14). The anniversary history included a table showing the progression of women police up the ranks from 1959, indicating a fairly steady ongoing rise in numbers at all ranks, but without the male equivalents shown.

3.5. *The United States*

The United States has a highly decentralised and diverse policing structure. At the national level, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reports on ‘Law Enforcement Personnel’ in the annual *Uniform Crime Reports*. Male/female numbers are reported for all sworn officers (no ranks) primarily by city size and by state. The oldest data at the Bureau’s website are for 1995, when the FBI reported data from 13,052 police agencies. Of 586,756 sworn officers, 9.8% were recorded as female (approximately 57,500). Larger cities tended to have more women officers – up to 15.6% – with some smaller cities having as few as 5.4% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1996, p. 283). The most recent data, for 2010, are for full-time staff only. Across 14,744 agencies, there were 705,009 officers, with women making up 11.8% (approximately 83,200) (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011, Table 74). Again, the biggest cities tended to have the most female officers – up to 18.1% – with small cities and some ‘nonmetropolitan counties’ having the lowest percentages – as low as 7.7%.

In 2010, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released a report *Women in Law Enforcement, 1987–2008*, analysing trends in women’s representation in policing across two decades. Overall, the report found a slowing in growth. Fig. 3 shows that, while female officers in local police departments followed a slow but fairly steady growth trajectory (from 7.6% in 1987 to 12.0% in 2008), there was a slight reduction in state police departments (including Highway Patrol) in the latter years (from 6.7% in 2003 to 6.5% in 2007). Furthermore, there was a large

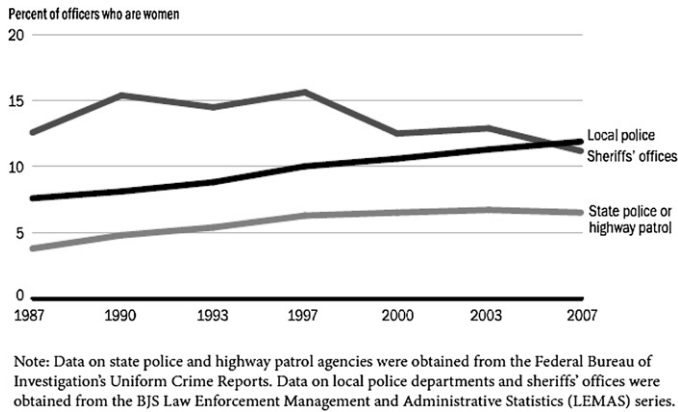


Fig. 3. Percentages of Women in US Policing: Local Police, Sheriffs' Office, and State Police/Highway Patrol, 1987–2007. Source: [Langton, 2010](#), p. 3.

reduction in the proportion of women in Sheriffs' departments (from 15.6% in 1997 to 11.2% in 2007) ([Langton, 2010](#), p. 3). However, the decline in female sheriff officers may have been due to the application of stricter counting criteria related to duties.

3.6. Canada

Statistics Canada reports annually on a variety of aspects of gender in policing in *Police Resources in Canada*. The 2011 report includes male and female numbers for approximately 156 local, provincial and national agencies; across ranks and different time periods. In total, the percentage of women officers increased from 0.6% in 1965 (190 of 30,146) to 19.6% in 2011 (13,605 of 69,438) ([Statistics Canada, 2011](#), p. 21). There was considerable variability in the total number of female officers reported at the provincial level for 2011, with the highest proportion at 23.7% in Quebec and the lowest at 12.3% in the Yukon (p. 22). The report also showed growth in the percentage of female officers at two ranks levels from 1986 to 2011. Women made up 0.2% of 'Senior Officers' in 1986 and 9.5% in 2011; and 0.5% of 'Non-commissioned officers' in 1986 and 15.8% in 2011 (p. 21). Unusually, the Canadian data were also represented graphically showing the long-term trends, with fairly consistent growth at the higher rank clusters and a levelling out at the constable level in the past five years ([Fig. 4](#)).

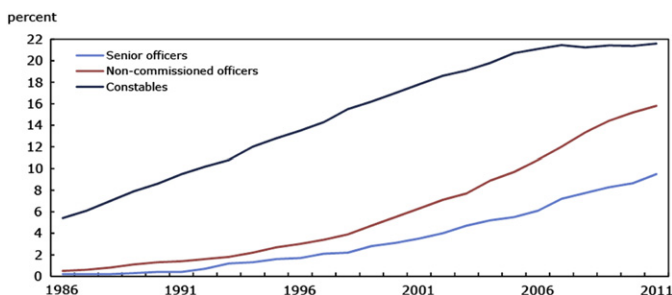


Fig. 4. Female police officers by rank, Canada, 1998–2011. Source: [Statistics Canada, 2011](#), p. 11.

3.7. Australia

Statistics on Australia's eight police departments are reported at a national level in two sources. The [Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services \(Police\) 2012](#) includes a section 'Staffing by gender'. The category is described as,

An indicator of governments' objective to provide police services in an equitable manner... Women might feel more comfortable in 'accessing' police services in particular situations, such as in relation to sexual assault, when they are able to deal with female police staff (2012, p. 6.11).

Despite this, the report only provides the total numbers of male and female police employees (32.6% in 2010–11), without differentiating sworn from unsworn officers (2012, p. 6.12). The second source, the Australian Institute of Criminology's annual compendium *Australian Crime: Facts and Figures*, includes a section 'criminal justice resources' that also combines sworn and unsworn staff ([Australian Institute of Criminology, 2012](#), p. 136). However, given Australia has eight police departments, it is feasible to examine each annual report, and available data are reported here by department. Only six departments report male/female numbers for sworn officers and only four report on the gender of recruits. The results for 2011 are shown in [Table 1](#), showing an average of 24.4% female officers, with variation between 20.8% and 28.8%. Available recruit numbers showed an average 30.1%, with variation between 26.6% and 33.1%. The New South Wales Police Force is Australia's largest police department, with 15,881 sworn officers in 2011 ([New South Wales Police Force, 2011](#), p. 79). Its annual report does not include figures on male/female numbers for sworn officers or trainees. The Northern Territory police annual report also does not include male/female numbers for sworn officers or recruits.

In terms of trends, only two departments reported data for five or more years. In the Western Australia Police, the percentage of female officers increased over five years, from 18.7% in 2007 to 20.5% in 2011, with a slowing in growth in the last three years ([Western Australia Police, 2011](#), p. 31). The Queensland Police Service included data over seven years, showing that the percentage of female sworn officers increased from 22.3% in 2005 to 25.7% in 2011, but with growth in percentages slowing to fractions in the last three years ([Queensland Police Service, 2011](#), p. 66). The percentage of female recruits fluctuated between a high of 37.7% in 2005 and a low of 33.1% in 2011, largely flat-lining around 33.5% in the last five years.

Four departments included male/female numbers across ranks in their annual reports, all in different formats. The most extensive were for Queensland, covering seven years, showing only very minor increases at some ranks, such as an increase from 7.1% females at 'Chief Superintendent and above' (1 of 14) in 2005 to 11.1% (2 of 18) in 2011 (2011, p. 66). While female

Table 1
Australian Police, Female Representation, 2011.

Department	Officers			Recruits		
	Total	Females	Female %	Total	Female	Female %
Tasmania	1260	364	28.8	—	—	—
Victoria	12,193	2996	24.6	271	72	26.6
South Australia	4718	1216	25.8	95	27	28.4
Western Australia	5988	1247	20.8	—	—	—
Queensland	10,916	2836	25.9	359	119	33.1
Federal	3217	711	22.1	—	—	—

Senior Sergeants increased from 7.3% to 10.6%, the proportion of female Inspectors decreased from 6.5% to 5.6%. In Western Australia, there was one female out of a total of 10 ‘Senior Police’ from 2008 to 2009 and none in the following years (2011, p. 31). The Australian Federal Police do not have a rank structure. For 2010–11, nine female ‘Sworn Police’ (18.7%) out of 48 officers were reported in the Senior Executive Service, with 30 females (16.3%) of 184 officers listed at ‘Band 9’ (the top band) (*Australian Federal Police, 2011*, p. 129). The South Australia Police have a complex rank structure. Some examples include the following, for 2011: 28.6% female Assistant Commissioners (2 of 7), 5.0% Superintendents (2 of 40), and 19.0% Senior Sergeants (28 of 147) (*South Australia Police, 2011*, p. 48).

All Australian police department annual reports make reference to equity and diversity policies. Most of the information is extremely vague, with the goal of a police personnel profile reflective of the community. Most strategies appear focused on supporting sworn women – for example, through mentorship programs and flexible employment options – rather than in recruitment.

3.8. New Zealand

According to the annual report of the New Zealand Police for 2010/11, women made up 17.6% of the ‘constabulary’ – including recruits (2011, p. 36). The report includes male/female numbers at all ranks, including recruits, for the reporting year and the previous year. A modified version is provided in *Table 2*, showing slight increases in most categories, but with a larger rise in female recruit numbers – from 18.8% to 27.1% – and declines at Superintendent and Inspector levels. The annual report includes several vague accounts of equity initiatives, including training in diversity principles (2011, p.35). Overall, recruitment was said to be aimed at creating a force that ‘better reflects the communities (police) serve’ (p.37).

3.9. South Africa

The 2010/11 annual report of the South African Police Service (SAPS) reports officers by gender and rank under headings of race or ethnicity as ‘White’, ‘Indian’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘African’, as shown in *Table 3*. In total, women made up 23.5% of sworn officers. Women’s representation improved at higher ranks, including 30.3% of commissioned officers. Some

Table 2
New Zealand Police, Gender x Rank, 2011, 2010.

Rank	30 June 2011			30 June 2010
	Total	Females	Female %	Female %
Commissioner	1	0	0.0	0.0
Deputy commissioner	2	0	0.0	0.0
Assistant commissioner	3	0	0.0	0.0
Superintendent	42	2	4.8	7.1
Inspector	270	23	8.5	7.0
Senior sergeant	414	42	10.1	9.6
Sergeant	1405	146	10.4	9.8
Constable	6485	1283	19.8	19.9
Recruits	218	59	27.1	18.8
Total	8840	1555	17.6	17.3

Table 3

SAPS Police Officers x Rank x Gender x Race/Ethnicity, as at 31 March 2011.

Rank/level	White			Indian			Coloured			African			Total F %
	M	F	F %	M	F	F %	M	F	F %	M	F	F %	
Top management ^a	2	2	50.0	1	0	0.0	3	0	0.0	16	6	27.2	26.6
Senior management ^b	135	46	22.9	31	8	20.5	44	17	27.8	253	111	30.4	28.2
Commissioned officers ^c	4057	2132	35.3	878	288	24.6	1458	625	30.0	8919	3625	28.8	30.3
Non-commissioned officers	9673	2735	28.2	2484	430	17.3	10,803	3013	27.8	79,503	23,450	22.7	22.4
Total	13,867	4915	26.1	3394	726	17.6	12,308	3655	22.8	88,691	27,192	23.4	23.5

^a Includes National, Deputy National, Divisional and Provisional Commissioners.^b Includes Assistant Commissioners and Brigadiers.^c Includes Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels and Captains.

Source: SAPS, 2011, p. iv.

background is provided to this in a forward to the annual report by the (female) Deputy Minister of Police M.M. Sotyu (SAPS, 2011, p. xi):

Government has been clear in its gender and equity representivity requirements... Over the last year serious efforts and advances have been made to promote gender equity by developing and appointing women in management posts. In addition the National Commissioner has prioritised the improvement of the gender ratio and he has instructed top management at all levels to ensure the continuous improving of the gender equity ratio as a matter of utmost priority. In addition, through the SAPS Women's network we are continuing to drive women advancement in SAPS.

Increasing the number of female police officers remains key to the success of our policing goals. It is key to reducing police brutality and definitely key to better handling the crimes of domestic violence and rape.

3.10. Ghana

There is very little information available on women in the Ghana Police Service (GPS). A short assessment was included in a 2008 paper on the involvement of female police in peace keeping by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre. In 2007, women constituted 19.7% of Ghana's police (4083 of 20,719), with 11.2% at Inspector level and 10.2% at Superintendent level (Ford, 2008, p. 16). Women made up 31.7% of recruits in January 2007 (p. 19). The report observed that the Service 'emphasises equality', including in its recruitment process, but that more could be done to target women (pp. 15 & 19).

3.11. Nigeria

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) provides almost no statistical data on the recruitment and progression of female officers. A 2010 report, *A Gender Policy for the Nigeria Police Force*, was developed by the NPF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the United Nations Population Fund. The report included an analysis of gender issues within policing, with a view to better policing practices to protect women. According to the report,

out of a total establishment of 291,094 officers in 2010, 36,128 or 12.4% were female (NPF/UNWOMEN/UNFPA, 2010, p. 65). Women made up 5.0% of ‘senior officers’, with less or no representation at the very top ranks. The report noted that the NPF was an extremely sexist organisation, with internal sexism associated with insensitivity to female victims of crime. Obstacles to the advancement of female officers included discriminatory language in documents, a marriage bar in recruitment, restrictions in deployment to secretarial and social work roles, and a lack of gender-based statistics to guide equity management. The report evidenced a commitment to improved equity through an advanced set of recommendations. These included a target of 35% female officers by 2015, revision of training and recruitment criteria, a proactive recruitment campaign, an internship program for women, preferential selection of women at senior ranks, and a compliance monitoring program (2010, p. 47).

3.12. India

Police personnel data are included with the *Crime in India* statistics published by the National Crime Records Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs (2010a, 2010b). The most recent data, for 2010, identified 1,223,319 officers across 35 police departments under the heading ‘Actual Strength of the Civil Police Including District Armed Police’. The total number of women officers was listed as 63,348, or 5.17%. Across rank clusters, the numbers were fairly similar: for example, 4.8% (471 of 9753) at the top Director General level; down to 3.6% (6142 of 166,746) around the Inspector level.

3.13. Pakistan

There are almost no data in official police or government reports relating to female officers within the numerous institutions of policing in Pakistan. A 2010 report, *Police Organizations in Pakistan*, by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, essentially ignored female officers (HRCP/CHRI, 2010). Brief mention was made of the establishment of ‘women only’ police stations by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The first, set up in 1994 in Rawalpindi, included one Inspector, two Sub-Inspectors, two Head Constables and 13 Constables (p. 31). A further six stations were established, until their spread was halted by the dismissal of the Bhutto government in 1996. Brief, and ambiguous, mention was also made of the reservation of training places for women in the federal Police Service of Pakistan: three of 35 places in 2008 (HRCP/CHRI, 2010, p. 43).

3.14. Hong Kong

At its website, the Hong Kong Police Force (2012, p. 1) asserts that ‘the percentage of women in the HKP is one of the highest among major police forces’, and that ‘in all parts of the Force women serve on an equal basis with their male comrades’. However, no statistics were provided in the personnel section of the website.

3.15. Papua New Guinea

The website of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary contains no annual report and no data on personnel, including female officers. The *Corporate Plan, 2006–2010* does not make any reference to women police (Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, 2006).

3.16. Fiji

According to the website of the [Fiji Police Force \(2012\)](#), there were 740 female officers (19.0%) out of 3875 officers, including ‘28 women officers in the Inspector level, 35 in the Sergeants level, 65 in Corporals and 612 in the subordinates level’. In addition, 69 female officers had been included in peace keeping missions overseas.

4. Discussion

The results of this research were extremely mixed. Publicly accessible data on the proportion of female police were obtainable for 18 of the 23 policing locations examined. The results are summarised in [Table 4](#). They show enormous variation between a high of 28.8% in Tasmania and a low of 5.1% in India. However, it must be noted that there were some outstanding results within the total figure of 25% for England and Wales, with three forces reporting female representation between 30% and 32%. There were also some surprisingly negative results, with considerable underperformance in a number of advanced democracies, including the United States – with 11.8% female officers – and New Zealand – with 17.6%. The United States provided a social laboratory on the issue of women in policing in the 1970s and 1980s, with research demonstrating the benefits of women in policing and forms of legal action that mandated affirmative action and improved recruitment of women ([Martin, 1980](#)). However, it appears that the overall effect of this has been very limited. The US [National Center for Women and Policing, 2002](#) conducted research on individual police forces in 2001, which identified six

Table 4
Summary percentages of female police officers and recruits.

Country/department	Year	% female officers	% female recruits
England and Wales (43 forces)	2009	25.0	37.0
Scotland (8 forces)	2008	23.1	—
Northern Ireland	2012	26.7	—
Eire	2008	21.3	—
United States (14,744 agencies)	2010	11.8	—
Canada (approximately 156 agencies)	2011	19.6	—
Australia	—	—	—
Tasmania	2011	28.8	—
Victoria	2011	24.6	26.6
South Australia	2011	25.8	28.4
Western Australia	2011	20.8	—
Queensland	2011	25.7	33.1
New South Wales	—	—	—
Northern Territory	—	—	—
Australian Federal Police	2011	22.1	—
New Zealand	2011	17.6	27.1
South Africa	2011	23.5	—
Ghana	2007	19.7	31.8
Nigeria	2010	12.4	—
India	2010	5.1	—
Pakistan	—	—	—
Hong Kong	—	—	—
Papua New Guinea	—	—	—
Fiji	2012	20.0	—

agencies with female representation between 25% and 41%. However, there has not been any follow up research at this level of detail.

Lower rates of female participation in policing are perhaps to be expected in emerging democracies and developing countries, where there are often strong legacies of male domination and limited capacity to enforce equity legislation. Nonetheless, there were some very strong results for South Africa – with 23.5% female officers – Fiji – 20.0% – and Ghana – 19.7%, with 31.8% recruits. These results were well ahead of the United States and ahead of New Zealand and on a par with Eire and Western Australia.

Very few sources provided long-term trend data that might provide a guide to the future. Trend data for five or more years were available for seven locations. Only England and Wales showed a continuing steady rate of increase around 1% per year. The other sources showed growth around this rate up until the last few years, when growth began to slow. Only Queensland provided trend data on recruits, which showed that the female proportion had flat-lined around 33.5% in the last few years. Recruit numbers for recent years from five other locations varied between 26.6% and 37%. Again, however, the UK figure of 37% included some outstanding recruitment figures, up to 58%. Overall, available recruit statistics were a long way from being adequate to feed into anything close to 50/50 representation in the future, or even 33/66 in many cases. Data on recruits were also highly inadequate, despite the fact that this is the first hurdle to a career in policing.

Data on rank, deployment and separation were also extremely limited. Available data indicated women were still very much confined to the lower ranks. However, trend data indicated they were continuing to move up the ranks, and there were examples of women at the very highest ranks – including in South Africa. There was also some evidence that women were being promoted ahead of men. There is a substantial pool of female junior and middle ranking officers that are likely to move up the ranks in the coming years. However, there is clearly a likely end to this growth as any lag from flat-lined recruitment works its way through the ranks. The only useful data on deployment came from England and Wales, showing some significant gains but an ongoing tendency for women to be concentrated in traditional areas working with their own gender and victims of crime.

There are considerable difficulties in interpreting these data. The available, and very limited, contextual information suggested that better outcomes could be related to a strong legislative and policy framework, and a history of government inspection and reporting. Selected cases from the British Isles stood out in that regard. Another possible source of improvement was the inclusion of gender equity as part of large-scale policing reforms, as in Northern Ireland and South Africa (see [Moses, 2010](#); [Ulicki, 2011](#)). However, discretion at the local or departmental level, particularly at the police leadership level, also seemed to play a crucial part in different rates of progress. This seemed to be particularly evident in the UK, although more research is needed on this issue ([Home Office, 2010](#)). Police organisations are somewhat notorious for tokenistic compliance with reform agendas, and management buy-in appears essential for compliance with the full spirit of equity legislation and policy (see [Charlesworth et al., 2009](#); [Dick and Cassell, 2002](#); [Dick and Hyde, 2006](#)). This also applies at the international level. There was very little evidence that United Nations' policies or agreements on women's employment or the protection of women from crime (e.g., [UNDP, 2007](#)) translated into practice within police departments without police leadership support – as in the Nigerian example. There was also some evidence from the United States that larger police departments were more successful in improving female representation than smaller departments.

The issue of a possible plateau effect in recruitment is particularly difficult to explain. Some reports suggested there was a ceiling on female recruitment, often around one third, even with

supportive employment practices that went beyond simple non-discrimination (e.g., PSNI, 2008). Above that point it is possible that policing is simply not an attractive occupation for women. In that regard, it is possible that some agencies were doing all that could be done to support gender equity, although these agencies could not be clearly identified. Many of the primary sources canvassed in this study, and much of the secondary literature, argues that most police departments could be doing a lot more — despite enormous progress in many cases (e.g., Corder and Corder, 2011; Ford, 2008; Home Office, 2010; Moses, 2010; NPF/UNWOMEN/UNFPA, 2010; Prenzler et al., 2010; Ulicki, 2011).

There are, therefore, some strong policy implications from this study. One thing that is certainly needed is regular equity audits of police departments. These examine all aspects of recruitment and progression in order to identify any unjustifiable obstacles to women's participation and recommend strategies for improvement. There are a number of models available for this (e.g., ACPOS, 2008; Home Office, 2010; Martin, 1980). Research and audit also need to identify demonstrated successful strategies that are likely to be applicable in other contexts (Home Office, 2010, p. 4). There is certainly wider evidence that large increases in female representation, at least up to around one quarter, can be obtained through fairly simple changes to recruitment and other human resource management practices. These include removing residual discriminatory barriers, such as marriage bars, replacing obstacle style fitness tests with health tests, and some affirmative action in the form of targeted recruitment of women and provision of application support classes (Prenzler et al., 2010). None of these approaches is particularly expensive or difficult. And many departments have successfully negotiated major changes to criteria in recruitment, deployment and promotion — around physical entry tests for example — as well as introducing equity committees, female representation on selection committees, and career mentoring programs for women. Two key ingredients in the implementation of such reforms are the establishment of a demanding accountability framework and the appointment of supportive police leaders.

5. Conclusion

An international survey identified a significant problem with a lack of accountability in relation to reporting on key indicators of gender ratios within police organisations. Despite a strong case for much greater female participation in policing, basic data on women's progress are often lacking, and there is an apparent large gap in many departments between positive gender policies and less-than-optimal integration strategies. Despite this relatively gloomy picture, available data indicate enormous improvements in the status of women police in numerous departments in the past few decades. There are also cases of outstanding success, particularly in recruitment rates above one-third and in the promotion of women to middle and senior ranks. At the same time, available evidence suggests that growth is slowing and that more focused, proactive, measures are needed to support women's entry into policing and career development. A number of factors are likely to contribute to this mission, including an appropriate legislative and policy framework, supportive police leadership, regular equity audits, and learning from the strategies of successful departments.

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